



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
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Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 27, 2004

The Honorable Eileen Cody, Chair  
House Health Care Committee  
Post Office Box 40600  
337 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Cody:

We are writing to you in support of House Bill 2711, relating to funding a central resource center for the nursing work force, scheduled to be heard before your committee today.

Our primary interest in the bill proposed today is due to our interest in promoting ways to increase the diversity of our health workforce as a means to address disparities in health status among Washington's increasingly diverse communities. The State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State;
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state – underserved, minority and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods.

Because of these findings, the Board supports the nursing central resource center's goal of facilitating partnerships to promote diversity within the profession. We would suggest added language in *italics* in two subsections of section 2, to strengthen HB 2711's focus on diversity:

- (a) Maintain information on the current and projected supply and demand of nurses through the collection and analysis of data regarding the nursing work force including but not limited to education level, *race and ethnicity*, employment settings, and nursing positions.

- (c) Evaluate the effectiveness of nursing education and articulation among programs to increase access to nursing education and enhance career mobility, *especially for populations underrepresented in the nursing workforce.*

Collection of race and ethnicity health workforce data is one of the Board's recommendations – it is vital to understanding the composition of Washington's health workforce and to evaluating the effectiveness of efforts to increase diversity. Several other groups addressing health workforce issues have highlighted the need for race and ethnicity data:

- One of the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force goals is to increase health workforce diversity, and outcome measures listed in the Task Force's report rely on the collection of race and ethnicity data (<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFRP02.PDF>).
- The Health Workforce Diversity Network's enumeration committee has recommended collecting race and ethnicity data following OFM's guidelines, available at <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/index.htm#race>.

An emphasis on access to nursing education and career mobility for underrepresented populations is also important to achieve the Board's, Task Force's goals, and Health Workforce Diversity Network goals. Hispanics are especially underrepresented in nursing – in 1999 Hispanics made up 7.5% of Washington's population, but only 4.2% of 2-year RN programs ([http://www.sboh.wa.gov/Priorities/disparities/2001\\_HD\\_Report.pdf](http://www.sboh.wa.gov/Priorities/disparities/2001_HD_Report.pdf)). In the Pacific Census regions, which includes Washington, Hispanics/Latinos made up 22.8% of the population, but only 3.5% of RNs, and Black/African Americans made up 5.8% of the population, but only 3.1% of RNs (<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bhpr/workforceprofiles/WA.pdf>).

Adding the language suggested above to HB 2711 increases the nursing central resource center's focus on diversity. As highlighted in the Board's health disparities work, efforts that result in increased health workforce diversity are likely to reduce health disparities through improved health care access, health care quality and health outcomes.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A.  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health



Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.  
Member, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Health Care Committee Members  
Representative Kenney, Chair, House Higher Education Committee  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Madeleine Thompson, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board and  
Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force staff  
Judy Huntington, Executive Director, Washington State Nurses Association and Health  
Workforce Diversity Network co-chair  
Steve Meyer, Department of Health